

HERBERT BUNDESEN, HATCHERYMAN OF THE 1950's

Interviewed by Thea S. Lowry, May 1990

and by

Maxine Kortum Durney, February 1994

Petaluma, California

In 1910, when he was sixteen, my father came from Germany. His family was from the Island of Langeness, an island off the German/Danish coast. He was one of six brothers, all of whom immigrated when they were sixteen and entered the poultry business. Many of the Petaluma poultry farmers were Germans, Danes and Swedes, plus a lot of Japanese were also in the poultry business, but not so many Italians or Portuguese; they were mostly in the dairy business.

After establishing himself, my father went back to Germany and took a bride. They came back and lived on Lohrman Lane near Straubville, named for a hatcheryman. I was born there in 1924 and grew up in the business. As children, we had to gather eggs and clean chicken houses; all very labor intensive as it was a layer operation. Farm kids couldn't play football, for instance, because of our after-school chores. The town kids seemed more affluent and their parents all usually spoke English, while the rural kids' parents often spoke their native language. The German community used to take one day off during the week, Wednesdays, and relax. We'd go up to the Russian River.

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Narrator: Personal Information Questionnaire

After high school, I was in the military service and then went to college. In 1948, I took a degree in poultry science at Cal Poly. They taught me a lot about genetics, nutrition, incubation and poultry pathology. I came back to Petaluma and went into the poultry business.

In the beginning, my brother Paul and I purchased the Petaluma Hatchery from L.W. Clark. It was on Main Street (now Petaluma Blvd. North), right across from Poehlmann Hatchery. This was about 1950.

We had the opportunity to move into Hardin Hatchery, a large brick building, corner of Main and Sycamore Lane. It burned to the ground in around 1958. Then we moved to Petaluma Cooperative Hatchery, which we purchased. It was a concrete building with brick facing, at 1290 Bodega Avenue. Further out on Bodega was Straub Hatchery. The Bihn and White Hatcheries were on Bodega Avenue also, closer to town.

There were two industries here, meat birds and layers. It was probably 40%/60% at first, but later these proportions reversed. My family's business was breeding for meat birds. We obtained our foundation stock from a major U.S. supplier, Christie and Nichols. These hens were the New Hampshire type originally sold as purebreds, then later crossed with Cornish males which made for a large-breasted meat bird.

THANK YOU

The chicken business underwent a metamorphosis similar to that of the turkey business when they went to white

feathered birds; everybody jumped on the bandwagon. Now producers went to White Rocks, and Arbor Acres was the primary breeder. Vantress breeding farm, the male breeding farm, developed. The hens carried the egg laying capacity and passed on the characteristics of the heavy meat-bird. Our hatchery produced baby chicks for the meat bird industry and the egg industry.

The Jewish, Chinese, and other ethnic groups, preferred their chickens to be prepared "New York dressed," which brought in a little more money. Not removing the head, feet and entrails seemed to intensify the flavor. There still is a market for this method of preparation, but regulators are wary of poultry which hasn't been eviscerated prior to sale.

After the war, California had to compete with Georgia, Arkansas, and Mississippi, working with a much lower cost basis. The interstate highway system was starting and everyone got refrigerated trucks. Prices were high during World War II, but later, because of the producers in the southeast, the industry had to integrate vertically. To eliminate each profit-taking layer, operators did their own hatching, feeding and processing. In those days it took 16 weeks to produce a four-pound fryer. Now it's less than half that time — seven weeks — to obtain a fryer of four pounds, all because of advances in breeding and nutrition.

Consumer tastes have changed, too. Chicken used to be prepared for "company"; now it's considered modest fare. A

chicken's useful yield is 70 - 72%, while beef is only 50 - 55%. Compare the raising of chickens to cattle ranching: One person can oversee 200,000 fryers. The productive capacity of poultry is outstanding.

I believe the future lies in genetic engineering. Nowadays chickens live longer because of better sanitation possible in the wire-floor cages. On the ground, we lost many, many more. Today's high production figures come from animals in perfect health. Poultry longevity is a miracle, not an aberration. And all from changes in methods which prevent infections and promote healthy birds.

When he was 84, my father died. We closed the hatchery in 1963. I'm in real estate now.

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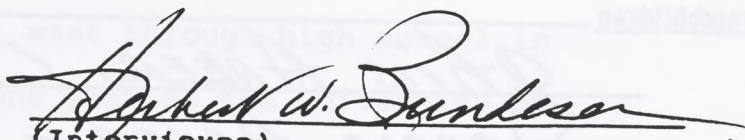
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PLACE

Petaluma CA

DATE

02-17-94


(Interviewee)

(for the Petaluma Historical Museum)

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Family History Questionnaire

	Name	Birthdate	Birthplace	Deceased? Date
Parents*	Henry T. and Dorothea S. BUNDESEN			
	Henry born Island Langness, Dorothea Island of Föhr - Both Germany - Both Deceased -			
Brothers & Sisters	Brother - Paul Bundesen -			
	Killed in Airplane accident along with Marshall Richardson of H+N Hattery Petaluma.			
Grand-parents*	HENRY T. BUNDESEN SR } Henry T. Bundesen			
	GOSINA BUNDESEN			
	William Feddersen } Dorothea Bundesen			
	Magda Feddersen }			
Spouse	Barbara F. Bundesen			
Children	Karl W. Bundesen -			
	Ann Carol Bundesen -			
	Janet Marie Bundesen -			
Grandchildren	Chris AAKER (Aaker)			
	Jennie AAKER -			
	CECIL BUNDESEN			

*Please include maiden name of mother and grandmothers.

THANK YOU!